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Students talking about transition to University – Lynda Turner

At college they took the time to explain things more when you asked about something

You were in longer in the day and sometimes you finished 5 or 10 minutes early but they always found things for you to do

The reading will always be related to the next lesson so if you haven't done it or don't get it it would be fairly obvious

It was all mapped out in your head what it was and how much detail to put in she'd go through it with us and then there'd be a summary and we'd go away and do some more

She'd give us the handouts and we didn't have to buy a text book because they always had copies in the library

The course material they provide is very good and they are written specifically for you and the work book goes along side so you can measure your own learning

At A level it would say in the workbook got to a certain page in the textbook

In all my lessons you had a work book where they set out questions and it had a whole plan in it



When the lecturer asks a question I don't know what to say because nothing is going through my head I knew a lot at college I don't know anything now

It's like a part time course you nip to and then go home and forget about it, it's less work than college

You don't really know what you are meant to be doing but you are expected to know what to do and how to get there

I wish there was more learning cos it feels like I'm paying a lot for only 3 hours a day it's nothing

I found it on Blackboard but then I didn't have a printer for a while and now I've not got internet at the flat

Cos the handbook they've got stuff up to Term 1 but I'm not actually sure what happens in Term 2 or when the exams are

I'd like to use the library but I don't know it well enough I don't want to be spoon fed I just want some reassurance and guidance as to how to go about it

It frightens a lot of people off trying to read those journal articles I thought what the hell am I doing here I don't understand this article she's give me to read

Once our assignments had been checked by the teacher that we'd got all the right information it went into our folder for evidence

We'd have practice tests near exams and you got your feedback and it was really helpful to have

They would mark over the weekend and then give it us back and show you how to pick up marks

We used to do a lot of practical assessment when I was at Tech but you can't do that here, homework was pretty much each session

In a nice manner you know not in a strict manner and you can go to them whatever problem you've got

She was more like a friend than a tutor you know she'd ask about your weekend you know you could talk about anything she was really nice

You saw her everyday she was really quite bubbly and friendly and approachable and if you had a problem you could talk to her

You could pop in at any time if she was free and talk and she would just say right we'll sort this out



I'm not really sure where to start we haven't really been given much help about how to go about writing this essay

When you hand in an essay you've no idea where it's gone you don't know if the tutor has got it or how or when you will get it back

I don't know that I am learning what to do for next time because they are not actually saying in the feedback they say use more references but it's all in 1 textbook so it's confusing what they mean

It's scaring me cos I've not done exams

I've been surprised at how friendly some of the lecturers are and how normal people are

I was worried about being late cos you know they said if you are 5 minutes late they don't let you in

You don't talk to a lecturer I couldn't put my hand up or shout out or anything

I think its one thing being an academic and having all that knowledge and another thing getting it across to somebody to bring it more to life

Increasing numbers of students are entering UK universities, creating an expanding body of work concerned with the transition from one educational institution to another (O'Donnell & Tobbell 2007, Raey 2002) Such research has provided an understanding of the experiences of students and the problems they face , however there has been little systematic research which generates a theoretical framework of transition. This project draws on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) in the form of situated cognition and on Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice (CoP) model of learning. The framework challenges traditional transmission models of learning and posits instead a distributed model, where all aspects of the environment and the individual interact in complex and non-predictable ways to form inclusionary or exclusionary trajectories for individual students. In understanding and addressing transition issues, attention needs to be given not only to the present educational setting but also to previous experiences. Because behaviour and participation are predicated on the complex interaction of person, task and environment everything that an individual brings to the context influences participation. Over the last 20 years in the UK there has been a significant move towards criterion-referenced and competence based assessment in post compulsory education and training. This has included the modularization of the “A” Level and AVCE in the context of “Curriculum 2000” and a greater transparency of intended learning outcomes and the criteria by which they are judged. Students can draft and redraft assignments, acting on feedback to improve their grades. They can also re-take unit and modular exams to retrieve fails and improve grades. This shift in practice has benefited learners as evidenced by the increase in numbers of learners retained in formal education and the range and number of awards they receive (Torrance 2007) It has also led to an overwhelming culture of tutor support which has increased arguably workloads for teachers. Similar levels of support, coaching and practice have also been observed in Access courses (Torrance 2007)

When students first come to university they enter a new learning culture. Whilst their student status confers the right to participate, their inexperience of the valued practices in the new environment locates them on the edge of the new community. Lave (1997) described this as legitimate peripheral participation. Over time, and with experience, students may adopt and perform the practices of the new community, which are typically quite different to their previous learning experiences. To make the task more difficult these new practices are often not explicitly stated. At the same time students participate in a number of other CoPs such as their family, friendship groups and work. The extent to which these communities overlap is also a significant factor in determining participation (Lave 1997) Learning therefore becomes a process distributed across person, time place and activity. This approach challenges the intra individual, transmission model of learning where teachers talk and students learn. Instead, learning is positioned in wider social and historical practices interacting to generate meaning which underpins a given communities activities. Whilst all students are legitimate peripheral participants by definition, this does not mean that there is inevitable progression to full participation. A significant number of students may be excluded from participation as a result of inflexible practice or lack of clarity in accessing the meanings which determine practice. One purpose of the project is to address this lack of clarity and to understand the nature of inflexible practice as a determinant of successful transition.

The dominant methodology in the CoP literature is ethnography (Wenger 1998) as this is the approach which allows the researcher to participate in some way in the lives of participants. Ethnography is the collection of data using multiple methods over a period of time in a specified context .The current project involves participant observations of the 1st year induction process, lectures and group work to document the practices involved in teaching and learning in Higher Education. Field notes will be taken amounting to 1 day a fortnight (in total) for an academic year. I am also collecting and analysing written information such as assignment briefs, handouts, module handbooks and University wide strategy documents. I have conducted semi structured interviews with 10 volunteers participants in Term 1 and intend to interview them again towards the end of Term 2. The data displayed on this poster was collected from the 1st set of interviews.

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The overall aims of this research are

- To explore the everyday activities in which pre university students engage
- To explore the everyday activities in which 1st year undergraduate students engage
- To accompany 1st year undergraduate students in their transition, documenting the explicit practices that mediate their participation
- To understand the implicit practices enabling and disabling full participation which exist in the University Department
- To explore the wider social and political imperatives which shape valued and not valued practices within Higher Education
- To generate a theoretical framework on transition to help understand the experiences of students
- To offer ideas and actions for Higher Education to address identified transition issues and so provide meaningful support

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